Self-esteem, body esteem, body mass and risk for disorders eating among French competitive and non competitive adolescent girls

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Introduction

Adolescence marks a time of rapid and intense emotional and physical changes. There is a heightened attention to social messages about cultural norms. Body esteem emerges as a significant factor associated with health and well-being during this developmental phase. This concept, however, has been found to be important for understanding eating problems in women (Button, Loan, Dacies, & Sonuga-Barke, 1997). Moreover, many researchers also indicated a relationship between low self-esteem and eating disorder symptoms in women. Thus, how adolescent girls formulate and define their body image ideals is strongly influenced by cultural factors. Media and aesthetic sport culture may promote specific images and standards of ideal that may contradict good health practices. The purpose of this study was compare global self-esteem, body esteem, body mass index and eating disorders symptoms in competitive synchronised swimming adolescents, adolescent girls in non-lean sports and female college non-athletes. We hypothesised that global self-esteem would be more highly related to general feelings about appearance than to weight satisfaction, in competitive synchronised swimming adolescents. It was also expected that these athletes would be more likely to engage in disturbed eating patterns than members of the other groups.

Methods

Synchronised swimming athletes in National Divisions 1 and 2 ($n=42$, $M=15.4$ yr., $SD=1.2$), national female athletes in sports where weight is “non-central” such as in basketball, tennis, handball, volleyball, soccer, skiing, horse-riding ($n=49$, $M=16.5$ yr., $SD=93$) and female college non-athletes ($n=50$, $M=16.3$ yr., $SD=1.1$) voluntarily participated in this study. They completed the Rosenberg Self-Esteem, the Body Esteem Scale and the Eating Attitudes Test, and the Body Mass Index was computed.

Results

Results showed that the synchronised swimming athletes differed from the female college non-athletes in global self-esteem and BE-Attribution ($p=.03$; $p=.02$, respectively) and from the two groups in BE-Appearance ($p=.002$; $p=.0$, respectively). As expected, correlation between global self-esteem and BE-appearance was significantly positive for synchronised swimming athletes (.43, $p<.01$). None significant correlation was observed between global self-esteem and BE-weight for all groups. No significant difference in BMI scores has been found between synchronised swimming athletes and female college non-athletes ($p=.06$). BMI contributed to predict negatively weight satisfaction ($\beta = -.47$, $t=-3.34$, $p=.002$) in synchronised swimming athletes and ($\beta = -.53$, $t=-4.33$, $p=.00$) in female college non-athletes. Participants did not differ on measures of EAT-26. When the 5 variables (global self-esteem, BE-weight, BE-Attribution, BE-Appearance, BMI) are entered in multiple regression analyses, BMI and BE-appearance explained together 41% of the variance in Dieting scores in the synchronised swimming athletes ($\beta =-.54$, $t=4.35$, $p=.0$, $\beta =-.36$, $t=2.91$, $p=.006$, respectively), BE-Weight and BE-appearance explained together 60% in Dieting scores in the athletes in non lean – sports ($\beta =-.48$, $t=3.27$, $p=.002$; $\beta =-.35$, $t=2.38$, $p=.02$, respectively) and BE-weight and BE-Attribution explained together 50% of the variance in Dieting scores in female college non-athletes ($\beta =-.60$, $t=-5.76$, $p=.0$ and $\beta =-.31$, $t=-2.94$, $p = .005$ respectively).

Discussion

According to Mendelson, White, and Mendelson (1996) synchronised swimming athletes’ global self-esteem was uniquely associated with feelings about appearance, but not with satisfaction with weight or with attribution of positive evaluations to others. Results suggested the importance attributed to weight for all groups. Nevertheless, synchronised swimming athletes did not show significantly more eating problems than members of the other groups. Results are ambiguous. Further research is needed to ascertain the meaning of eating problem measures and to gain a more complete understanding of female athletes’ eating habits and their relation to body esteem.

References
